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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ejas/7741>

DOI: 10.4000/ejas.7741

ISSN: 1991-9336

Publisher

European Association for American Studies

Electronic reference

Daniel Candel Bormann, « Too Many Munnies, too Many Americas: the Answer to the Academic Frontier in Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* », *European journal of American studies* [Online], 4-2 | 2009, document 6, Online since 17 December 2009, connection on 15 November 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/ejas/7741> ; DOI : 10.4000/ejas.7741

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Too Many Munnies, too Many Americas: the Answer to the Academic Frontier in Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven*

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- 1 Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* represents a pivotal moment in the history of the Western, and the Western in the self-understanding of America. If we judge from the current state of *Unforgiven*-studies, the notion of America appears as an open frontier, interpreted in wildly different, at times even contradictory ways. As regards *Unforgiven*, these interpretations are linked to the understanding of the main character, William Munny, and also Little Bill.
- 2 The origin of these contradictions seems to lie in the failure of previous criticism to systematically build up its findings into a coherent understanding of the characters. Without intending to judge individual contributions, some of which are absolutely brilliant, previous criticism does not present a satisfying state of the art. Most contributions wield their pens as frontiersmen carried their guns when they ventured into Frederick Jackson Turner's uncharted territory, daringly but failing to acknowledge the previous acculturation of the space they were trespassing on. Thus, *Unforgiven*-critics are notorious for not taking up issues addressed by earlier critics, failing to harmonise them where contradictions exist, or to separate the wheat from the chaff.
- 3 In the case of William Munny, this leads to contradictory claims regarding his complexity, which goes from absolutely flat (Smith 266) and iconic (Ingrassia) to extremely complex (Krapp 597-98) and psychoanalytically motivated (Grist 298-99). How complex can a movie be if its main character is too simple? And how complex can a character be who is tacitly accepted by critics to be one-dimensional? For all critics separate the 'good', socialised and ineffectual Munny – who may not be himself (Blundell & Ormand 544) – of the beginning with the wicked Munny of the end, who coincides with the Munny we don't actually see in the movie, the one who killed indiscriminately (Yacowar 254; Krapp 600).

- 4 Even more troubling is Munny's thematic allegiance, which ranges from nature – expressed variously as savagery (Yacowar 254), killing machine (Tibbets 11), or pure id (Knapp 163-64, 166-67) – to pure metaphysics (Beard and, to a certain extent Plantinga and Ingrassia). Metaphysicians are fewer but more adamant than naturalists. They base their claims on Little Bill's final "I'll see you in hell," before he dies, and Munny's nodding agreement (Beard 44; Plantinga 78), the metaphysical character of the Eastwood persona in previous movies (Beard 44; Ingrassia 57; see also Plantinga 71), the split-up of the persona into demons and angels (Skerry 289), exaggerations of the superhuman and human, which opens Munny to deconstruction, and thus to full humanity (Beard 47-48), and Girard's notion that at the root of orderly society lies sacred violence (Redmon 315).
- 5 Naturalists, on the other hand, tend to emphasise nature via savagery,¹ but often qualify such savagery with metaphysical epithets and ethical overtones.² There is an evident problem here: savagery, ethics and myth belong to different, even opposed categories – nature, society and metaphysics – and are not easy to fuse except in the case of the 'bon sauvage' – 'bon sauvagerie' just does not apply to Munny – and of a sufficiently complex Munny.
- 6 Krapp has already shown awareness of the limits of this dualist conception of approaches to Munny when he distinguishes between the 'psychoanalytic' and the 'religious interpretations' (597), and pleads for weaving them together (604-05). Frye has proposed to view *Unforgiven* much as we could consider *High Plains Drifter* – and *Pale Rider* – as movies where "Both natural and supernatural explanations for events are possible [...] but the audience cannot finally know which is true" (67). These contributions point critical attention in the right direction, although for different reasons each fails to provide definitive interpretations of either Munny or *Unforgiven*: Krapp unduly reduces nature in the film by limiting it to psychoanalysis, and Frye's ignoramus as to the status of nature or the supernatural can only take place because contemporary critical debate has failed to interpret correctly essential plot elements which characterize William Munny.
- 7 In view of this critical chaos and the resulting contradictions, the present article aims at bringing some order by starting to take seriously what previous critics have said, and add some fundamental evidence not yet interpreted correctly, to decide between a complex or simple Munny on the one hand, and a natural and metaphysical one on the other. This will also require knocking existing consensus on the head by partially pleading against a socialised, ineffectual and unreal, albeit good Munny sandwiched between two evil, but real and highly effective – natural or metaphysical – Munnies (see, for example, Beard 45).
- 8 The critical review up to here, and especially the distinction between the different Munnies, shows that criticism of *Unforgiven* works with the classical triad nature-society-metaphysics, with the good but probably false Munny of the beginning described as a socialised being, and the evil Munny representing natural or supernatural, "Godlike/bestial" forces let loose (Blundell & Ormand 539). Since the sophists, the distinction physis-nomos, nature-society, forms part of western culture (Spaemann 2001, 128-30). To that pair Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* adds metaphysics by distinguishing between "the life of enjoyment [...], the political and thirdly, the contemplative [life]" (1095b.18-20).³
- 9 I would like to provide continuity to this unacknowledged approach to *Unforgiven*, but by initially moving out of Munny, to slowly focus on him after having re-created a

framework, one which previous criticism has to a great extent already provided for use, but one which still knows moot points, especially as regards our understanding of Little Bill. To do so, I propose to locate Aristotle's metaphysics not in Munny, as Beard would have done, nor in the angel of death of Munny's delirium, nor in his wife Claudia, who supposedly watches over him and his children,⁴ but in what is possibly the 'pars motrix and centralis' of the movie: myth. I am interested above all in the place of the myth of the hired gunman, which Beauchamp is responsible for. Critics have focused in Beauchamp's myth-mongering and what it stands for, the genre of the Western, in terms of the gap between what is and what is not, i.e. in terms of lying (Yacowar 255; Beard 57). This is not wrong, but if we look at myth in the movie from the perspective of the Aristotelian triad, myth is metaphysical because through writing it ensures the survival of the object of myth after its physical death. Myth is also metaphysical because, as the movie proves time and again, it seems to bear little resemblance with the way things really are, with nature. In *Unforgiven*, the metaphysics of myth is, however, crucially induced by society, which is itself embodied above all in W. W. Beauchamp (Beard 56), the writer, but also in the population of Big Whiskey (Blundell & Ormand 550). In *Unforgiven*, society is in need of myth, of metaphysics, basically because society experiences itself as lack.

- 10 This social need of metaphysics already starts at the beginning of the movie, with the oral transmission of the cutting of Delilah, and Schofield Kid's self-presentation and presentation of William Munny. However, myth receives more sustained treatment in Beauchamp's attempt to capture it in a living person, first English Bob, then Little Bill, and finally William Munny. Beauchamp moves from one object of worship to the next because society's need of myth requires that whenever myth's object is revealed as human, myth has to search for a new metaphysical candidate. In all previous cases, whether the prostitutes, English Bob or Little Bill, myth proves false. Curiously, however, in the case of Munny, myth seems to find its true object, a human person acting metaphysically, paradoxically the only person who won't let the myth-monger approach him, as criticism has pointed out many times but failed to evaluate, as we will see.
- 11 The three characters who apply for myth share a past as hired gunmen and the performance of atrocious deeds, mostly in a drunk state. At the same time, differences also abound. Criticism has shown how English Bob - the name is telling - is presented as a socialised being because of his obsession with hierarchy and aristocracy (Plantinga 69). It is, however, precisely this obsession with society, the 'dignity of royalty', as English Bob explains on his visit to the barber, which makes him eligible for myth. This is so because the royalty which Little Bills self-electedly represents in America elicits "awe," a feeling which is usually reserved for the metaphysical. So in English Bob an Anglo-European, hierarchic and metaphysical notion of the social opposes America, an "uncivilized" and "savage" country, devoid of "honor" and "laws," as English Bob denounces when he both enters and leaves Little Whiskey.⁵ From English Bob's perspective, Britain is society, because vertical, America nature, because horizontal, and only the verticality of society can induce the awe of metaphysics, as Beauchamp stresses in his written account of the Duke's exploits (again, the name is telling).
- 12 Little Bill demystifies this metaphysical socialisation, and, if we follow both Aristotle's and criticism's indications, once we are bereft of metaphysics and society, what remains is nature. One critic has interpreted English Bob's demotion as the consequence of "punctur[ing...] the arbitrary nature of signs" (Blundell & Ormand 552), as if there were nothing left once socialisation has been exposed. In a sense, this is true, for the Duke

turned duck is a demotion of something into nothing. On the other hand, reference to ducks is reference to nature, however ridiculous, and English Bob's polished demeanour towards ladies and throughout shootings as narrated by Beauchamp's incipient dime novel is reduced to lust and drunkenness in Little Bill's corrected account, and both lust and drunkenness refer, in different ways, to nature. In fact, after leaving the barber, English Bob expresses his socialised wish to drink tea, but his previous dialogue with the barber makes it clear that what he wants is to have sex with a prostitute, and sex is, in representational terms, nature. In addition, English Bob's use of the Queen's English is faulty, and once he's been ridiculed, "he reverts to his "natural" Cockney" (Plantinga 70), thus signalling another return to nature. So English Bob's loss of a socialised dimension - with metaphysical overtones - entails his naturalisation.

- 13 At the same time, it is true that this naturalisation is ambiguous, for Bob's demystifying leads to his emasculation, above all metaphorically via the bent gun returned to English Bob after leaving jail (Saunders 118; Krapp 598). A paradox emerges here, for while English Bob's mythical status is demoted by reference to natural fact, naturalisation emasculates him, robs him of his natural power, symbolised in the drooping gun/penis, although English Bob seems to have a well-functioning sex organ, as frequent reference to his sexual interest in women makes clear.⁶ This calls for an explanation which will be provided later.
- 14 Little Bill comes next as a candidate for acceptance into the fame-hall of myth. Apart from being near-namesake with William Munny (Saunders 119), he shares with Munny two traits which distinguish him from English Bob. Like Munny, he shows no interest in sex (Yacowar 252); like Munny, his brutalities take place against the background of protecting the community. That seems to de-naturalise both characters: abstinence in the metaphysical direction, communal behaviour in the social direction. Apart from that, his theories about what makes a good gunman - above all, being cool-headed - and his lack of fear seem to make him different from English Bob, who does not dare to face Little Bill when he is offered a pistol to shoot him down.
- 15 Most critics don't advance theses on why Little Bill loses at the end of the movie; only Blundell & Ormand put it down to his excessive brutality on the one hand (551), and on the other hand on his failure as a sheriff to accompany with deeds the signs he is in command of - mainly the display of Logan's body (552). The first reason calls to aid poetic justice, the second seems to me to depend too much on Blundell & Ormand's deconstructive habits on the one hand, and their desire to find parallels between *Unforgiven* and Homer's *Iliad* on the other.
- 16 My hypothesis also depends on the notion of poetic justice, but offers sustained evidence for it. We have seen how in English Bob (and Schofield Kid) socialisation gives rise to false myths. Little Bill also moves close to English Bob, for socialisation gets hold of him superabundantly, something only Motley has inadvertently suggested when, for insufficient reasons, he calls Little Bill an "inhibitor of manhood." The reasons for Little Bill's socialization are numerous: for one thing, he often has his deputies around him for cover. Next, he wants to build a country house and retire, in a manner of speaking, something which different critics have identified as a socialising move (Beard 55; O'Brien 177; Blundell & Ormand 550). At the same time, "he just ain't no carpenter," which serves as a metaphorical judgement on Little Bill's social qualities.⁷ More importantly, he accepts Beauchamp and tells him about his past exploits, in the process even pontificating about good and evil. Finally, he likes to theorise, and theorising, while helping to understand

the object of analysis, creates a distance between the one who thinks and the object of thinking.

- 17 All these elements amount to a socialisation of Little Bill: keeping company, looking forward to a retirement, myth-making, story-telling, moralising and theorising, are all vitally connected with the social, rather than the metaphysical or natural dimension. Most critics refer to Little Bill's association with Beauchamp and his penchant for theorising at one point or another, but for the wrong reasons.⁸ In comparison with "English Bob's falsity," Little Bill is "frank American brutality," i.e. nature (Blundell & Ormand 555). But if nature makes him win the first round, bowing down to society makes him lose the final, for the simple reason that it is society which is baying for myth, for something society is not, wherefore myth cannot accept the social as a metaphysical category.
- 18 At this point, we can return to William Munny. As we have seen, previous critics have not failed to notice that our first encounter with the good Munny yields a thoroughly socialised widower, father and pig-farmer. Criticism has also shown how this attempt at socialisation is as unsuccessful as Little Bill's when he builds his country house (Saunders 119), and how socialisation is expressed in anti-natural terms, as when Munny proves unable to mount his horse and shoot his gun, when his muscles ache after a day's ride, or when he falls ill on entering Big Whiskey. Munny's socialisation also involves his entry into the metaphysical realm, for it is his pious wife who socialised him, and she is now dead and, so Munny believes, guarding him and his children from heaven. That metaphysical affinity through his wife also works against his nature, for Munny does not, generally speaking, visit whores (it is only here that he proves "worthier" than his associate Ned Logan), he does not masturbate, and neither does he accept Delilah's offer of a free one.
- 19 Criticism thus knows much about the good Munny. On the other hand, its assessment of the evil Munny is in need of correction, and I would like to single out three pieces of evidence which direct our response to Munny in a decidedly natural rather than supernatural direction, but which criticism has not considered adequately. They all take place right after the final shootout.⁹ Firstly, there is the brief dialogue between Little Bill and Munny as to moral justice:
Little Bill: I don't deserve this... to die like. I was building a house.
Munny: Deserve's got nothing to do with it.
- 20 Here Munny rejects Little Bill's moralising, as he does when, to the accusation of having murdered the unarmed barkeeper at the beginning of the shootout, he retorts with a prosaic "He should have armed himself." Critics have either just mentioned these two passages (Grist 300; Blundell & Ormand 548; Vaux 445; Krapp 600), or recognised that what they do is reject the moral or ethical dimension in human beings (Saunders 122; Frye 71). But even these critics do not draw the consequences of a disavowal of morality.¹⁰
- 21 The second instance takes place during the following dialogue between Beauchamp and Munny:
Beauchamp: Who'd you kill first?
Munny: Huh?
Beauchamp: When confronted by superior numbers, an experienced gunfighter will always fire on the best shot first.
Munny: Is that so?

Beauchamp: Yeah, Little Bill told me that. You did probably kill him first.

Munny: I was lucky in the order. But I've always been lucky when it comes to killing folks.

Beauchamp: That so? Who was next? It was Clyde, right? You must've killed Clyde, well, could've been deputy Andy, wasn't it? Or...

Munny: All I can tell you is who's gonna be last.

- 22 Again, this encounter has been commented on by many critics, and by all for the wrong reason.¹¹ Beauchamp's squaring of Munny's killing order with Little Bill's theory shows a basic difference between Munny and Little Bill: Bill, as we have seen, likes theorising, and we may remember that this theorising drive is part of his socialising process. Munny, however, has never wasted a thought on theories, in fact he is astonished that shooting orders can exist, and believes he has just been lucky in surviving the shootout.
- 23 Blending the first with the second example – the rejection of deserve, and emphasising luck in, rather than theorising about, the killing-order – yields a world-view in which morality is absent, chance rules, and things are just what they are, devoid of a function, a purpose. Now these three elements are pillars of our contemporary stereotype of nature: nature is neither good nor bad, nor does it do things for reasons, nature just is, and in being imposes itself. The stereotypical rather than real basis of this view of nature does not take one iota from its relevance as a cultural fact.¹² Denying this stereotype would hurl us back to the teleological paradigm of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas, a view in which nature has a telos, a direction inherent in its own self and its development which makes its development and ultimately its being functional, and in which good and evil consist in trespassing or not on this telos, i.e. accommodating or not to function (MacIntyre 53). For better or for worse, Western culture rejected this paradigm when it exited the Middle Ages. Its adoption of "nature-as-it-is" was probably as much a rebellion against the manipulation of "nature-as-it-ought-to-be" for social reasons, as a consequence of science's need to dispossess nature of any telos inherent to itself for purposes of scientific and technological manipulation (Jonas 54-55; Spaemann, *Philosophische Essays* 42, 44). Be that as it may, the fact remains that it makes little sense to talk of Munny as representing any kind of metaphysical entity. He is nature through and through.
- 24 Some contemporary readers may find teleological reasoning problematic as evidence for nature. For such readers, Beauchamp's final encounter with Munny provides compelling evidence based on a different kind of reasoning. Part of the dialogue in this scene propels us back to the first encounter between Little Bill and Beauchamp. To Beauchamp's first introduction of himself as a writer, he is asked whether he writes letters by both Bill and Will, and both are thereby securely placing themselves in the position of nature as against Beauchamp's culture. Of these two, however, only Little Bill allows Beauchamp to become his biographer. In doing so he actively aspires to myth and proves "infected" by society's necessity for myths. He desires what society desires; in so doing he is socialised. Munny remains impervious to such temptation, thus staying on the other side of myth and society, firmly ensconced in nature. This is not presented as a conscious decision on the part of Munny, but as an inability to desire what society desires. This inability elevates him to mythical status, but it also demotes him to nature rather than make him human.
- 25 In being natural, Munny may be said to become the very frontier as defined by Frederick Jackson Turner. Just as the frontier disappears around that time, giving way to an at least geographically civilised America, at the end of the movie Munny becomes civilised

(again), which is shown via reference to his dealing in “dry goods,” as the final postscript proclaims. Such an interpretation would confirm previous naturalist critics in their interpretation of Munny. And yet, there are indications that Munny does not exactly correspond to the beastly and dangerous nature that the frontier represents. When critics speak about the evil Munny, qualifications like brutal and beastly are not wanting. Yet these same critics also emphasise in passing another kind of nature operative in Munny, for during his first encounter with Little Bill Munny is also “reluctant to enter into violence” and during the final shootout he is “calm (in contrast to the panicked deputies)” (Plantinga 78). If he is violent, it is not so much because he is brutal or beastly, but rather because he gives proof of little conscience (Smith 267) and “little opportunity to reflect upon such sentiments and consequences” (Plantinga 74).

- 26 Naturalism has shown us that nature can be represented as “red in tooth and claw,” but also as doggedly obtuse. Despite differences, there is something in Munny which reminds one of Thomas Hardy’s “Darkling Thrush,” rather than Blake’s “The Tyger” or Tennyson’s “The Eagle”. The Munny we know throughout the movie is not evil and natural in the sense of beastly, but rather in the sense of lacking intelligence and being persistent: he is thoughtful but plain, looks rather slow in his thoughts and actions, even when the latter are deadly; he is not given to emotional raptures; he handles the pigs clumsily and unsuccessfully, but prefers to wallow in the mud than to give up; he seems to believe more in the metaphysical presence of his wife than his own children – who are more metaphysically aware than adults, as we know¹³ – and holds fast to that metaphysics in ways which demand either great self-knowledge, which is difficult to observe in him, or childlike/childish belief, a belief which makes all the more poignant the Freudian contradictions which he incurs in (Grist 1996). Even the self-awareness he shows during his delirium is, while as intense as the proximity of death could warrant, expressed in formulae taken from evangelical Christianity (Frye 69).
- 27 In all these ways, Munny is a kind of nature, but nature from the very beginning, even when he appears to us as a socialised being, wherefore in many ways there is no real change between the initial good and the later evil Munny: shooting seems to define him no more than pig-farming. It is true that at the end Munny’s shooting is successful, but, like dogged nature, Munny just remains calm under fire. And his motivation, revenge for a friend, and the way of carrying out the revenge – here I am, one against twenty, I couldn’t care less – may not so much reflect excessive pain, sacred omnipotence, or drunken stupor. Rather, it reminds us of something Munny has proved time and again throughout the movie, that he calls a spade a spade: “I am here, Little Bill, to kill you for what you did to my friend Ned Logan.” Munny’s boldness coincides with his baldness.
- 28 And yet, more than once the movie proclaims that in the past Munny has been “one son of a bitch,” and as we have seen at the beginning of the article, critics have tried to connect this Munny with the evil Munny of the final showdown. There is ample indication of that in Schofield Kid’s admission that “I ain’t like you” just before he disappears, in Munny’s re-learning to ride, shoot and drink, and Clint Eastwood himself has endorsed such a view (quoted in Tibbets 17). At the same time, unquestioning acceptance of such a parallelism is also lack of awareness that unfair tricks are being played on the audience which prevent it from realising how different pre-Claudia Munny is from the Munny who avenges his friend Ned Logan. This leads us to the naturalising function of drink in the movie. Many critics have drawn attention to, but not the right conclusions from, the effect whiskey has in Munny. References to drink tend to be made

only in passing (Yacowar 254; Skerry 290; Blundell & Ormand 546; Krapp 600). >From a discursive angle, it seems whiskey is at the origin of Munny's evil behavior, for when Claudia "straightened [Munny] up[,] she cleared [him] of drinking whiskey and all," as Munny confesses.¹⁴ Drinking and being drunk is an ambiguous factor to analyse in the naturalisation of a person: on the one hand, it naturalises the drunk by robbing him of his reason and will, but at the same time, it achieves that "natural state" by artificial means and diminishes the drunk's natural capacities, as Macbeth's porter knew when he said that drink "provokes the desire, but [...] takes away the performance" (2:3, 20).

- 29 In *Unforgiven*, the art of the gunman is a drunkard's art. And yet, the movie shows different degrees of drunkenness, and we can possibly distinguish the effects of drink in the movie's past and its present. The reminiscences about English Bob's, Little Bill's, and William Munny's past atrocities are of the legless type: so drunk they can't remember, so drunk they can't aim, so drunk they fall from their horses, so drunk they are mean and vicious. On the other hand, drink in the present, in Schofield Kid before shooting and Munny before the final shootout, annuls only part of their moral faculties and maybe fear, but seems paradoxically to improve their shooting and health - on first entering Big Whiskey, Munny catches a cold because he refuses to drink. Past drinking emasculates and makes you evil, present drinking improves your shooting, keeps your health and a conveniently reduced moral integrity.¹⁵ Munny's final massacre may go against all the conventions of the Western (Tibbets 10-11), but is at least motivated by friendship, and we can see very well how this persona who kills out of friendship does not coincide with the man who was "the meanest god-damned son of a bitch alive" and "killed just about everything that walked or crawled." The different ways in which drinking affects characters in the past and in the movie's present is thus a clue for our understanding of William Munny, and aligns the two post-Claudia Munnies against the pre-Claudia Munny. It also explains why on the one hand English Bob's reversion to nature denatures him at the same time, whereas drinking just naturalises Munny during the final shootout.¹⁶
- 30 The present article has read America by trying to bring some order into the interesting, but chaotic state of criticism as regards *Unforgiven* in general and William Munny specifically. The article has proved that of the two interpretations that criticism makes of William Munny - the metaphysical and the natural - the natural one prevails. The analysis has tried to take seriously previous criticism by taking up its Aristotelian approach to the movie as regards its division of reality into the social, natural and metaphysical dimension. To make this division meaningful, the article has started by relocating metaphysics in the myth of the hired gunman, rather than the evil Munny. Analysis has then moved to a comparison between English Bob, Little Bill and Munny with regard to their fitness as objects of myth. Despite obvious differences, the former two appear as thoroughly socialised beings, the ultimate reason for denying them entry into myth. Via analysis of the final dialogue between Munny and Little Bill, and above all the meeting between Munny and Beauchamp, I have shown how William Munny represents nature rather than metaphysics through his rejection of social trappings, expressed as a disavowal of morality, an inability to theorise, and lacking interest in becoming the object of myth. The nature that Munny represents has, however, been shown not to be characterised by beastliness and brutality, as previous criticism maintained, but rather by primitivism and persistence. This result required arguing at least partially against the critical consensus of both linking the beastly pre-Claudia Munny with the Munny of the final shootout, and sandwiching the good Munny in-between the evil ones. The article has

done this by giving grounds for a partial fusion of the two post-Claudia against the pre-Claudia Munny. This has happened mainly via a discussion of the relationship between drinking and nature, which shows that the movie “cheats” by assigning to drinking an emasculating and brutalising effect in the past and a merely naturalising one in the present.

- 31 I would like to close by stating that the results offered in this article, while decidedly opting for a specific kind of natural – and rejecting the supernatural – dimension in our assessment of William Munny, are in no way intended to mean that that is all there is in Munny. It is true that a natural Munny sounds one-dimensional. On the other hand, such a Munny happily coexists with the psychoanalytic variant Grist provides, which is just another variant of the natural. This new Munny even buttresses the brutality of the evil Munny of the final shootout, but mediates it through his simplicity. One can be simple, be a brute, and still have some principles and a tormented and convincing inner life, the only problem here being that, in fundamental ways, Munny stands for America. I would also like to deny that the results of this article make Munny flat in any way. If anything, they provide an added explanation of the way in which complexity is attained in simplicity, which may in the end be one of the lasting technical contributions of Eastwood in *Unforgiven*, as it is an important way in which America understands itself. Some work is still to be done to make Munny cohere further in the fullness of his contradictory complexity, but I sincerely hope that future research chooses to follow a trail of coherence, rather than persist in providing individually brilliant, but collectively sterile, work.

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America, Western, *Unforgiven*, Clint Eastwood, William Munny, Nature, Metaphysics, Aristotle, Little Bill

NOTES

1. They do so in the equation between the wild frontier and Munny the frontiersman (Yacowar 249, 251), Munny's "primeval savagery" during the final shootout, and the acceptance that the degeneration of a socialised being turns him into a savage (Yacowar 254; Krapp, 600), also expressed as a struggle between id and super-ego (Grist 298-99)
2. Thus Munny also represents for them a "mythic idealized American" who looks "secure in his ethics and his real strength of character" and (Yacowar 253) and 'deconstructs and then reincarnates into a mythic, yet malefic, archangel-hero' (Knapp 162).
3. In his *Christian Doctrine*, St. Augustine goes one step further by adding individuality to the picture: "there are four kinds of things that are to be loved,—first, that which is above us; second, ourselves; third, that which is on a level with us; fourth, that which is beneath us" (1.23.22). Judging from the difficulty of talking about individuality (Ricoeur), and from critical work done up to now on *Unforgiven*, and with the exception of Knapp, who valuably points at shortcomings, but does not provide solutions, individuality is not a dimension needed for the present analysis. For a theory of literary analysis which works with the four dimensions, see Candel (2008).
4. The relationship between Munny and Ned Logan has also been referred to as transcendental (Blundell & Ormand 546).
5. It is interesting that English Bob levels this "accusation" specifically at the prostitutes, and in doing so, treats them the way Little Bill treats them at the beginning of the movie, as animals and potential property. This contrasts with Munny's gentle treatment of Delilah after his delirium.
6. The case of Schofield Kid mimics English Bob's: the desire to be a living myth is accompanied by a natural disability (in his case, short-sightedness) which impairs his shooting ability. That leads Ned Logan to inspect his gun in case it is bent, and to inspect all that is accompanied by successful sexual performance in Big Whiskey.
7. Through carpentering, Little Bill's communal efforts also compare unfavourably with William Munny's. Munny's community consists of his kids, as he tells Ned, while Little Bill's protection of the community is ultimately aimed at protecting himself.
8. Little Bill's association with Beauchamp is interpreted either in terms of the significance it has for Beauchamp (Blundell & Ormand 559), or for Little Bill himself. In the latter case, the interpretation of the fact is correct, for in accepting Beauchamp, Little Bill "secur[es] his own inscription in the myth of the American West" (Krapp 598). The socialising consequences Little Bill's acceptance has are, however, left untouched by criticism.

9. We have seen that, as regards the intratextual evidence after the final shootout, the metaphysicians call to aid Little Bill's "I'll see you in hell" before he dies, and Munny's agreeing "Yeah." There are, however, more plausible ways of accounting for this exchange than by making of Munny a metaphysical killer. First of all, it may just be the typical acknowledgement that both Munny and Little Bill have done evil things in life, and that they will pay for them in their afterlife. Secondly, while in general it is true that after the shootout a supernatural aura hangs about Munny, it only does so for the population of Little Whiskey (Blundell & Ormand 549; see also Ingrassia 57). Although Krapp interprets Munny's final speech as metaphysical (2002, 602) – Frye calls it brutal (2002, 71) – such an interpretation is clouded by his insistence on reading *Unforgiven* in terms of Walter Benjamin.

10. These two lines are also interesting because, for the first time in the movie, Little Bill proves to be afraid and his fear is a social one. Before the encounter with English Bob, one of the deputies declares Little Bill knows no fear (see also Saunders 122), although another one also admits that "everybody can be scared," thus making of fear a sign of nature rather than of emasculation. If we compare Little Bill's final social fear with Munny's fear over the weight of his sins during his delirium, the latter's fear seems more genuine and convincing than the former's. To me, this comparison is not as clearcut as the others, wherefore its inclusion in a footnote.

11. Thus, for Blundell & Ormand, Munny's rejection of Beauchamp says nothing about Munny, and much about myth (560); Plantinga notices Munny refuses to mythologise his past, unlike Little Bill, but never goes beyond the assertion (75-76). As to being lucky in surviving the shooting, the critics who refer to it never interpret it (Yacowar 253; Beard, "Unforgiven" 60; Plantinga 71).

12. "Symbolic animals stand merely for the absence of certain human powers and feelings, even though in real life animals may share these" (Midgley 122).

13. Children only slowly dissociate their own self from their environment, phantasy from reality, and living from dead (Prekop & Schweizer 62).

14. Likewise, Munny links drinking and evil when he proclaims to Schofield kid that he "ain't like that anymore, kid. It was whiskey done it much as anything else. I ain't had a drop in over ten years. My wife, she cured me of that. Cured me of drink and wickedness."

15. It is thus difficult to maintain, as Krapp does, that "Having killed in a stupor, Munny can only seek redemption in a repetition of his drunken behaviour" (596).

16. One further reason for holding that in *Unforgiven* drinking leads towards nature rather than away from it is that, while Munny cannot resist not drinking, he still resists the bragging that leads to self-aggrandizement and which Little Bill falls prey to (see Krapp 596).

ABSTRACTS

Taking William Munny and Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* as short-hand for America, the present article solves what is probably 'the' critical impasse in *Unforgiven* studies: the degree of complexity of William Munny, and his ascription to the natural or supernatural realm. The article makes the natural interpretation academically binding, and makes a case for complexity in simplicity. To do so, it first makes conscious, and then relocates, critics' unreflective use of an Aristotelian distinction in their interpretation of English Bob, Little Bill, and William Munny. This relocation allows crucial parallelisms to surface between English Bob and Little Bill, which in turn explain why these characters have to fail as objects of myth. The article then teases out a natural interpretation of William Munny by re-interpreting both Munny's meeting with Beauchamp and his final dialogue with Little Bill, and explains why this natural allegiance differs from previous natural interpretations of Munny.